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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000250

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WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS,  
INL FOR KEVIN BROWN, DIANNE GRAHAM AND MEAGAN MCBRIDE

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SUBJECT: HAITI CARNIVAL 2009

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1. Summary: Haiti's 2009 Carnival celebrations were marginally more violent than last year's but still within acceptable limits by the improved security standards of today's Haiti. An increased presence of the Haitian National Police (HNP) helped keep the inevitable violence down. For the first time since MINUSTAH's arrival in Haiti, the HNP assumed full responsibility for Carnival security in Port-au-Prince. The one death that occurred was due to an accident. Political tensions regarding the exclusion of the Lavalas party from upcoming elections and the country's continuing economic struggles did not mar the festivities. Post-Carnival commentary on the celebrations focused on complaints of poor organization. End summary.

'Hand in Hand, Life Can be Beautiful'

2. President Preval officially launched the festivities on Saturday, February 22 where he formally presented the Carnival kings and queens at the Carnival ball held in the National Palace. The Carnival parade began late Sunday afternoon February 23, kicking off a lively three day party that lasted until early in the morning of February 25. For the following three days and nights, downtown Port-au-Prince swelled with crowds estimated at one million total over the course of the weekend. The centerpiece of the festivities were private sector-sponsored floats covered in business advertising. 'Allegorical' floats featured dancers and other costumed participants parading colorful paper-mache masks depicting various themes. Other floats carried the best-know Haitian musical groups blaring their compositions for the party-goers.

3. The Carnival's theme this year -- 'Hand in hand, life can be beautiful' -- was intended to encourage responsible civic behavior and public cleanliness (particularly to discourage littering the streets). Press reports and several public officials noted, however, that print and radio failed to promote this year's message. These media spent most of their time and resources playing Carnival music and debating which band would win the coveted prize for the most popular Carnival song.

4. The day after events concluded, the government extended the Carnival spirit by declaring February 25 (Ash Wednesday)

a national holiday. All government business remained suspended and most private sector businesses shut their doors. Most Haitians stayed away from work the rest of the week, February 26 and 27. Carnival celebrations thus idled Government offices and some of the private sector for an entire week.

#### Complaints of Poor Organization

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15. Despite the generally festive atmosphere, many participants complained that Carnival's fun was greatly dampened by Mayor of Port-au-Prince Muscadin Jean Yves Jason's poor planning and organization, and Minister of Culture Olsen Jean Julien's tardiness in releasing Carnival funds to the Mayor's office. A total of 40 million Haitian gourdes (USD 1 million) was distributed. This was 2 million gourdes short of what was promised by the Minister of Culture. Both the Minister and the Mayor went on the radio on separate occasions blaming the other for organizational failures.

16. Some participants vented their frustrations to the press about the event's poor management. Ill-timed insertions of floats into the parade, a broken down tow truck to service floats, and an inadequate number of ambulances were some of the complaints. Poloff observed on February 24 that though most of the stands were beautifully decorated, some were also left unpainted and unfinished. Press reports complained that the many bands failed to give good performances. Well-loved musical groups such as Boukman Esperyance and RAM failed to show up for their scheduled performances. Yet despite these complaints, Embassy officers attending the events observed an overall positive and festive

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spirit.

#### Security

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17. Security at the event was relatively good. RSO observed that at least 2,000 HNP were deployed over the course of the three days, a fifty percent increase from last year. All seven-hundred and two HNP cadets from the class that graduated February 27 were deployed at the event. Poloff observed February 24 the HNP wearing brand new, highly visible florescent colored duty gear provided through assistance from INL/NAS.

18. Unlike last year, HNP controlled all aspects of security both in and outside the main Carnival routes. MINUSTAH played no direct role. According to Commissar Destorel Jermain, the Central Director for Administrative Police, a total of 853 police officers were mobilized; 703 administrative police officers; and 150 CIMO (SWAT) officers. Seven hundred Police Academy cadets were deployed along-side regular certified police. Multiple HNP officers were stationed at each of thirteen check points within the main parade areas. One roving patrol continuously monitored each checkpoint using hand magnetometers (metal detectors) to check suspicious individuals. Within the CIMO compound near the National Palace, the HNP placed a 'quick response force' on duty for emergencies. For the first time, HNP Director General Mario Andresol arranged for VIP parking and police-escorted shuttles to transport VIP's and members of the diplomatic community to the official government stands. Around greater Port-au-Prince, HNP positioned 172 checkpoints, each manned by four officers. Last year, MINUSTAH operated most of these checkpoints in the outer cordon.

19. HNP spokesman Gary Desrosie reported 685 injured in Port-au-Prince, although news sources placed the number as high as 750. The one death occurred when a fifteen-year-old girl fell off a truck carrying the popular Creole rap group

'Barikad Crew' and was crushed under its wheels. Chief Prosecutor Joseph Manes Louis told Poloff February 27 that between February 22-24, police arrested 95 persons for minor crimes, and 32 for violent crimes, committed with knives, batons, broken bottles and ice picks. One person was arrested carrying an ice pick stuffed into a baguette. A five-year-old girl was reportedly raped and seven kidnappings occurred both in and outside of the capital. There were at least ten house robberies which occurred while residents were away from home during the Carnival events.

¶10. Historian Georges Michel and sociologist Roselyne Benjamin issued a media statement days before Carnival began urging revelers to refrain from violence -- notably the use of knives, machetes, and other non-firearms. A February 27 HNP review of events notes an increase in violent crimes committed at this year's Carnival. (Note: Embassy has no statistics from last year, but notes an approximate 35 percent increase in injuries in Port-au-Prince over last year. End note.) Pierre Esperance, Director of the Haitian-based National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH) concurred, saying February 25 that violence has become more commonplace at Carnival events and is calling for new legislation that would punish those who commit crimes during public festivities.

¶11. Comment: Despite a marginal increase in violence, and the complaints of poor organization, the overall spirit of Carnival 2009 was positive. The HNP is continuously refining its security techniques for handling mass public events. After fielding more officers at this event every year, it finally assumed full responsibility for Carnival 2009 security for the first time since MINUSTAH arrived in Haiti. Earlier indications that the political party Fanmis Lavalas would seek to disrupt Carnival events to protest its exclusion from upcoming Senate elections failed to materialize. Embassy EAC determined that security was

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sufficient to allow mission employees to participate in Carnival events on a limited basis. However, there is room for improvement in the future, given the public's higher expectations of local and national government for this most popular Haitian event.  
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